



## Indivisible: Central Maryland

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### **SUPPORT SB 129** **Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings**

**Bill Sponsors:** Senators Hettleman and Waldstreicher  
**Committee** Judicial Proceedings  
**Organization Submitting:** Indivisible Central Maryland  
**Person Submitting:** Susan Radke, Lead Advocate  
**Position:** FAVORABLE

My name is Susan Radke and I am a co-leader of Indivisible Central Maryland, a grassroots group of constituents living in Central Maryland counties who are dedicated to protecting progressive and democratic values. **Indivisible Central Maryland strongly supports SB 129**, which would establish legal representation administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to provide access to legal representation to certain individuals undergoing immigration proceedings. I urge you to support this bill as it will provide asylum seekers and immigrants to legal representation in deportation hearings and allow for due process during these hearings.

Several members of Indivisible Central Maryland created a group of volunteers called Asylum Helpers. This group of amazing volunteers collect donations, groceries, baby formula, diapers, clothing, and have provided furniture for several asylum families living in Central Maryland. Volunteers also provide transportation to and from physician offices, ICE check-in's and are known to pay rent as well as utilities for families who arrive to the State of Maryland. Volunteers collected funds and also paid fees so immigrants could be released from detention. Asylum Helpers also work with several non-profit organizations to assist on immigration issues.

While we have expertise in fundraising for a limited number of families, what is most heartbreaking is witnessing the devastation that occurs when our immigrant families are unable to obtain legal counsel. Our asylee families do everything in their power to become documented, but cannot afford low bono, or full fees for immigration lawyers. These fees are astronomical not only for them, but also for the Asylum Helpers. Families become despondent and fear separation because they have no legal representation during detention hearings, or while waiting for a Master Hearing to determine if they can remain in the United States. A majority of the immigrants we serve work at least two jobs, contribute to their community, and pay taxes. Yet they are unable to obtain legal representation to become documented, and work towards becoming full United States citizens.

Having legal representation will increase the likelihood that asylum families and immigrants will win their cases while they are in detention. Indivisible Central Maryland and the Asylum Helpers strongly support SB 129 and request that the Senate vote to pass this legislation.

Susan Radke, lead advocate, on behalf of Indivisible Central Maryland and the Asylum Helpers

**Asylum Helpers**

Jenny Marie Brown  
Melissa Hook  
Trish McDonald

Crystal Shelley  
Susan O'Connor  
Meena Sahu

Meghan Maher  
Liz Enagonio